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Get Out of Afghanistan and Everywhere Else

by Jacob G. Hornberger

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If there was ever a classic example of a quagmire, it has got to be Afghanistan. Hey, they're going on 8 or 9 years of killing the terrorists and just now getting a good start. What began out as a quest to kill or capture Osama bin Laden has morphed into long-term occupation of the country.

Hardly a week goes by without reports of new deaths, including Afghani citizens and U.S. soldiers or allied foreign soldiers.

Yet, despite the constant death toll and the lack of a well-defined mission, the Pentagon insists on the importance of continuing the occupation of Afghanistan.

Why?

Because the Pentagon knows that if the troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan and the Middle East, Americans might well begin asking the questions they should have asked in 1989, when the Berlin Wall came crashing down and the Soviet Empire disintegrated: What do we need a huge standing military force for? What do we need an overseas empire for? What do we need the enormous expanse of military bases across America for? Indeed, what do we need the Pentagon for?

The fact is that despite deeply seeded fears and anxieties that the federal government has succeeded in engendering within the psyches of the American people, there is no nation on earth that has the military capability of invading and occupying the United States. To cross

either the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans with an invasion force would require tens of thousands of ships and planes, a capability that is nonexistent among all foreign nations.

Of course, the big bugaboo that the Pentagon now uses to justify its existence (along with the enormous tax burden necessary to sustain its enormous military) is terrorism (as compared to communism, which was the bugaboo prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the Soviet Empire).

But the threat of terrorism is a direct result of what the Pentagon did both prior to and after 9/11 as part of its aggressive, interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East. That threat has remained constant, of course, given the continuous killing of people in Iraq and Afghanistan for the last 8 years.

But the Pentagon knows that by withdrawing from Afghanistan and the Middle East, that constant threat of terrorist retaliation plummets. At that point, the only risk of terrorist retaliation would be from some disgruntled person whose family members or friends were killed by the U.S. military sometime in the past. There's no need for an enormous military to deal with that possibility, and the Pentagon knows it.

If the Pentagon withdrew from the Middle East, military officials know that people might well ask, Why stop there? Why not withdraw from Europe? After all, the Cold War ended long ago. Why not withdraw from Japan? It surrendered soon after the atomic bombs were dropped. Why not withdraw from Korea? The war there ended decades ago. Why not withdraw from Africa? What business do the troops have there?

In fact, the only argument that the Pentagon will have left is the one it was making in 1989 to justify its continued existence: the drug war, especially in Latin America.

The Pentagon knows, however, that there are risks with that justification. One big risk is that people all over the world, including the United States, might finally decide to bring an end to this decrepit old war by legalizing drugs. Reputable and credible people from all over the world are now arguing that that is the only solution to the drug-war horror. In fact, in a move toward legalization Mexico recently legalized possession of small quantities of illicit drugs.

Moreover, the Pentagon knows that one of these days Latin Americans might start asking a discomforting question: If the American people will not permit the U.S. military to wage the war on drugs in the United States, why should Latin Americans permit it to wage the drug war in their countries?

The best way to avoid having Americans asking why we still need a big military force is simply to continue the occupation of Afghanistan. Not only does the occupation provide constant proof that there are still terrorists to kill, it also generates its own never-ending supply of terrorists. The Pentagon knows that under those circumstance people are less likely to question the existence of an enormous military, along with all the hundreds of billions of dollars necessary to support it.

